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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 164  
By Sands

A RESOLUTION to honor Mt. Pleasant Vice Mayor Willie Baker upon receiving the 1997 Recognition Award from Middle Tennessee State University's African American History Month Committee.

WHEREAS, it is fitting that the elected representatives of the State of Tennessee should pause to pay tribute to those exemplary citizens who have given unselfishly of themselves, their time and their talents to perpetuate the public good; and

WHEREAS, Mount Pleasant Vice Mayor Willie Baker is one such remarkable person, who has achieved great professional success and has also devoted himself to the betterment of his community; and

WHEREAS, he was honored on February 13, 1997 with a Recognition Award from the Middle Tennessee State University's African American History Month Committee; and

WHEREAS, he is a quiet man who wants no recognition despite the unique distinction he holds as Tennessee's first black mayor and head basketball coach in a predominately white school; and

WHEREAS, basketball is a sport which teaches many important lessons that Mr. Baker has successfully applied to life, including the value of hard work and discipline, the necessity of overcoming obstacles and the will to achieve; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Baker became the first black mayor in Tennessee when he was appointed in 1985 to finish Ray Wilson's term. He served in that position until 1989; and

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WHEREAS, Mr. Baker has served in some capacity on the commission since 1975; and

WHEREAS, a native of Huntsville, Alabama, he is credited with paving a road for other African Americans to follow. It is a path that led him through a teaching career filled with fond memories and a dedication to America's youth and his community; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Baker has always placed a high value on education; he graduated as valedictorian in 1951 from Clark High School in Mount Pleasant. Upon graduation he entered Tennessee State University for one year before entering the military; and

WHEREAS, after an honorable discharge, he re-entered TSU and earned his Bachelor of Science degree in 1956 in Health and Physical Education, and a Master's degree in Educational Administration; and

WHEREAS, his 33-year teaching career began in South Fulton, Kentucky, where he taught algebra, English, social studies and coached boys' basketball. He was later recruited to Lawrenceburg, where he taught for three years; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Baker briefly left teaching for three years to work for the Monsanto Company; and

WHEREAS, he returned to teaching at Clark High School, where he taught social studies, health and science, and coached football and basketball; and

WHEREAS, one of Mr. Baker's most rewarding experiences was when the team won the 22nd district championship; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Baker was chosen to transfer to the predominately white Haylong School, where he taught physical education and served as the assistant football coach, becoming a pioneer in school integration in the process; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Baker made history as the first black head coach of a predominately white school in the state of Tennessee when head coach Paul Gossett left his position; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Baker led his team to the first Walking Horse Bowl held in Marshall County, which they won; and

WHEREAS, in addition to this distinguished award, Mr. Baker has been recognized with numerous other commendations; and

WHEREAS, his many successes aside, Mr. Baker is most appreciative of the love and support he shares with his wife, Helen Farrell Baker, and their six children, each of whom has made his or her mark on the world and is highly successful in their own right; the children are Carolyn Osborne, Glenn Baker, Glenda Doss, Loree Knowles, Ronald Andre Baker and Sharon Yvonne Baker Blair, who is deceased; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Baker is delighted to be called Grandpa by his eleven grandchildren; and

WHEREAS, it is fitting that this Assembly should provide special recognition to this fine gentleman who has given much of his life to public service to better his community and the state he dearly loves; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE-HUNDREDTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, That we hereby salute Mr. Willie Baker for his unflagging commitment and outstanding work as a community servant, and we congratulate him on his most recent distinction as recipient of the 1997 Recognition Award from Middle Tennessee State University's African American History Month Committee.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.